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ABSTRACT

In response to the changing world economic market, foreign language teachers of the University of Akron and Akron Public Schools (Ohio) began a joint project, federally supported, to strengthen foreign language teacher proficiency in the area of careers in business, education, and government service, strengthen oral proficiency of high school language students, and develop an exploratory career program in international studies for urban and minority high school students. Akron's Critical Foreign Languages Program included: (1) a 2-week intensive summer institute for 20 high school foreign language teachers; (2) a conversational partner program for high school students studying French, Spanish, and Chinese; and (3) a 4-year high school curriculum plan for international studies. The summer institute was designed to increase teachers' knowledge of the role of foreign languages in international careers, develop proficiency and cultural awareness in business French and Spanish, and encourage expansion of foreign language curricula. General and language-specific sessions were included. The conversational partners program paired high school and college students for opportunities to improve language skills in an informal setting. An interdisciplinary, international studies curriculum was developed as a model for school districts, to emphasize that foreign language skills and intercultural awareness can enhance career opportunities. A sample Spanish lesson on applying for a job is appended. Contains 5 references. (MSE)

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PROGRAM FOR THE IMPROVEMENT AND EXPANSION OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

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PROGRAM FOR THE IMPROVEMENT AND EXPANSION OF
FOREIGN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

The world economy is undergoing rapid change. More countries have entered the marketplace and America's share in this global economy has diminished. Moreover, our schools are doing an inadequate job in preparing youth to meet these new challenges. In a meeting of the National Governor's Association (Shenon, 1989) held in February 1989, a panel of governors warned that the economic well-being of the U.S. is in jeopardy because so many Americans are ignorant of the languages and cultures of other nations. At this meeting, Governor Gerald L. Baliles of Virginia, chairman of the National Governor's Association, stated, "The U.S. is not well prepared for international trade. We do not know the languages, the cultures, or the geographic characteristics of our competitors." The realities of the U.S. trade deficit and the increasingly competitive world market mandate that American students develop a realistic understanding of other nations and develop the skills to communicate with them. At this national meeting, the governors produced a report recommending that states alter public school curriculums to add international studies, including foreign language training and geography, beginning in elementary school (Shenon, 1989).

According to a nationwide study done in 1985 by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (Cardascia, personal communication, March 28, 1990), only 32.3% of high school students ever study a foreign language. Far fewer high school graduates become proficient in a foreign tongue. At a time when more and more U.S. businesses are internationalizing, there is an increasing need

for executives with international backgrounds who are sensitive to cultural differences and have proficiency in foreign languages. These companies find that few Americans meet these requirements and often prefer hiring foreign born graduates of international business schools because they are already bilingual and bicultural (Deutsch, 1988).

In an attempt to respond to this increasingly demanding situation, a joint project called the Critical Foreign Languages Program, was established between professors at the University of Akron and public school foreign language teachers in the Akron Public Schools in Ohio. The project was assisted by a $115,000 federal grant from the U.S. Department of Education. The 20 month project, which was carried out between August 1987 and March 1989, had three main goals:

(1) To strengthen the knowledge and proficiency of foreign language teachers in the area of careers in business, education, and government service;

(2) To strengthen the oral proficiency of high school students studying foreign languages;

(3) To develop an exploratory career program in international studies for urban and minority high school students

In order to achieve these goals, the following components of the Critical Foreign Languages Program were developed:

(1) A two-week summer institute for foreign language teachers

(2) A conversational partner program for high school students studying French, Spanish, and Chinese

(3) A four-year curriculum plan for international studies for high school students

Each of these three components will be elaborated upon in this paper.

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The Summer Institute for Foreign Language Teachers

An intensive two-week summer institute was offered to 20 foreign language teachers from school districts in northeastern Ohio. Ten French teachers and ten Spanish teachers were paid stipends from the grant to attend the institute. They were selected for the program on the basis of teaching experience, educational background, professional activity in the field of foreign languages and interest in improving foreign language education.

The institute took place June 20 through July 1, 1988, at Central-Hower High School in Akron, Ohio. The institute was designed to increase teachers' knowledge of the role of foreign languages in international careers; develop teachers' proficiency and cultural awareness in business Spanish and business French, and sensitize teachers to the need for expanding the foreign language curriculum. To meet the various goals of the institute, both general sessions and language specific sessions were offered.

In the general sessions, speakers from international businesses, international organizations, government service, and the teaching professions gave presentations to the teachers followed by discussions. In these sessions each of the speakers described the pre-career training, the types of job assignments, and the opportunities available in different international careers. The importance of proficiency in foreign languages was a recurrent theme throughout these sessions. For example, an economist from the Interamerican Development Bank stated that international banks were interested in hiring staff with expertise in a technical field and high levels of proficiency in one or more foreign languages.

In the language specific sessions the participants attended classes in either business French or business Spanish. In these sessions, which were conducted entirely in the target language, the participants learned technical vocabulary, practiced conversing on topics related to business, and discussed ways to develop business-related curriculum materials and lessons appropriate for secondary students.

The following topics were introduced in the business Spanish sessions:

(1) Examples of business topics and activities

(2) Applying for a job and interviewing for a job

(3) Cross-cultural communication in business and social situations

(4) Taking a business trip

(5) Investigating companies in different countries

(6) Business correspondence: business letters and telephone communication

The following topics were introduced in the business French sessions:

(1) Examples of business topics and activities

(2) Choosing a career

(3) Applying for a job; Employment ads

(4) Telephone interviews

(5) Cross-cultural communication in business and social situations

(6) Banking operations

The instructors, who were foreign language teachers with background knowledge in business, used a variety of teaching strategies and materials in these sessions. The activities included reading and discussing business correspondence; listening to and dramatizing television commercials; role playing business negotiations, and writing resumes and business letters. Many of the activities were done in groups and a spirit of camaraderie prevailed among the teachers. A wide variety of materials were used in these sessions including: French and Spanish commercial dictionaries; videocassettes and audiocassettes on various business topics, resource books on business topics and authentic materials such as magazines, newspapers, television commercials, business letters, telephone books, and bank checks and receipts from Spanish speaking and French speaking countries.

In an effort to help teachers plan for teaching business-related topics in their own classrooms, a small library was set up with over one hundred different materials. The topics covered in the library were business French, business Spanish, careers, international organizations, and intercultural communications. The collection included maps, posters, and pamphlets from 25 embassies.

An example of a lesson from one of the language specific sessions can be seen in Appendix A.

The participants in the institute were given two major assignments, one to be done in a group and the other individually. For the former assignment the participants formed small groups and developed mini lessons for language instruction in business-related topics. On the final day of the institute, the teachers role played

their lessons and presented them to each other. The lessons were videotaped and copies were made available for the teachers. The videotapes provided the teachers with a means of disseminating to their colleagues in their school districts the knowledge they had gained at the institute.

The other assignment given to the participants was to develop a unit for teaching business Spanish or business French at the secondary level. Due to the time demands of this assignment, the teachers were given the rest of the summer to finish it. The completed units were made available to all participants in the institute and thus provided another means of reaching their colleagues in their own and other schools. With these units the teachers had fully developed business-related lessons that could be directly applied to their teaching situations. This was a particularly valuable resource since no curriculum guidelines for business Spanish or business French were available in the school districts in which these teachers taught.

The teachers rated the institute highly on an evaluation instrument administered at the concluding session. A Likert scale was used, with 1 representing a low rating and 5 representing a high rating. Most items were rated between 4.5 and 5. The areas that were unanimously given the highest ratings were related to increasing foreign language teachers' intercultural communication and sensitizing them to the need to expand the curriculum beyond language to business and government. In their responses to open-ended questions, the teachers revealed that they thought the strong points of the institute were the caliber of the instructors -- their

knowledge, enthusiasm, and resources, the opportunity to practice their own foreign language skills, and the practical applications of foreign languages to the business world. A common theme in the teachers' responses was the intent to include business units in their foreign language courses.

As a follow-up to the two-week institute, study tours to France and Mexico were planned. This component was only partially successful because an insufficient number of teachers signed up for the Mexican tour resulting in its cancellation. However, the tour to France did take place with four French teachers participating. The group went with a French professor to Talloires in the Haute Savoie province of France. The tour included intensive sessions in business French, tours to banks, shops, and factories, and interviews with French people in various business occupations. The participants' evaluation of this tour was overwhelmingly positive.

Conversational Partners Program

The Conversational Partners Program paired Central-Hower High School students studying a foreign language with students from the University of Akron. The purpose of this program was to provide high school students with individual opportunities to improve their foreign language fluency in an informal setting.

The program took place over the four semester duration of the grant. Three different languages were involved: Spanish, French, and Chinese. Approximately 100 high school foreign language students were involved in this project. The approximate numbers for each language group were as follows: 35 students of French, 50 students of Spanish and 15 students of Chinese. The students participated on

a volunteer basis and received credit in their foreign language classes for involvement in the program. Nine university students (two French speakers, two Chinese speakers, and five Spanish speakers) were paired with these high school students. The college students were paid a stipend for their involvement. These students were chosen for their fluency in the target languages and their interest in the program.

Many more high school students were interested in participating in this program than college students. The reason for this was mainly due to scheduling problems of the college students. Because of the limited number of college students participating in the program, many of them had to come to meet with their partners at the high school twice a day every day of the week.

Orientation sessions were provided for both the college students and the high school students to inform them of the goals and organization of the program. After these sessions the high school students were paired with their conversation partners according to their schedules. The conversation sessions took place at the high school and were scheduled during study hall, lunch period, or foreign language class periods. Each high school student met with his/her partner once or twice per week for forty minutes each session. In most sessions one college student met with two or three high school students to have a conversation.

A major advantage in operating this program was the fact that the high school was contiguous with the university and therefore within walking distance. A major difficulty in administering the program was coordinating the schedules of the high school students with the

schedules of the university students. Exam schedules and impending due dates for major assignments impacted negatively on the college students' ability to keep up with the frequent meetings. Another difficulty was finding a qualified coordinator for the program. Despite these problems, the high school students overwhelmingly appreciated the program as evidenced by their comments on an evaluation instrument. A sampling of their remarks follows:

. I had a first hand look at the country I'm studying, and my poor language habits were corrected.

. My partner got my mind going. I could relax and just let my Spanish go to work.

. Colombian people are the nicest human beings that I've ever met from a foreign country. They are extremely polite, clean, outgoing and beautiful.

. I'm very pleased to have a tutor like this. I improved my conversations, vocabulary, and languages.

. I learned that French people are just like Americans in many ways. The things that were different helped me to understand.

One thing that was evident from the reactions of the high school students was that they gained more than an opportunity to practice their oral skills in the language they were studying, they learned something about the culture of the language they were studying.

According to their foreign language teachers the Conversational Partner Program gave the high school students more self-confidence and made them more willing to participate in class. The effectiveness of this program is evident in the fact that it did not discontinue when the grant ended. It still continues today even though the college students do not receive a stipend for their participation. Interest remains high in this program.

International Studies Curriculum

An international studies curriculum was developed as a model for school districts in the northeastern Ohio region. The focus of the interdisciplinary curriculum was to emphasize that foreign language skills and intercultural awareness can enhance career opportunities in the areas of business, government service, and politics. The development of the curriculum took many hours of gathering information and many contacts with people in internationally-related organizations. Six main steps were necessary in the formation of this curriculum plan.

The first step was to gather information on international studies. The project's staff attended meetings, lectures and conferences on business, politics, and foreign language education. Numerous business and community contacts were made, such as with the Akron Rotary Club. Additionally, teachers and administrators were contacted and interviewed in high schools with international studies programs around the country. Books and curriculum materials on Business Spanish and Business French, international affairs and intercultural communication were purchased, read, and catalogued.

The second step was to do a survey of businesses and organizations in the greater Akron area to identify the need in the area for knowledge of foreign languages, the emphasis according to these organizations that an international studies program should have, and potential resources for the international studies program. Extensive research was done to compile a list of organizations and businesses in the area with international connections.

A questionnaire was then developed which had questions such as:

Would your company/organization find it valuable to know a foreign language?

Do you have anyone on your staff whose bilingual ability was instrumental in his/her being hired?

The program received 33 responses from 54 surveys (61%). Seventy-nine percent of the respondents felt that it would be valuable for some or all of their personnel to know a foreign language. The majority of the respondents felt that an international studies curriculum should focus on international awareness (60%) and foreign language competency (58%). Twenty-one of the 33 respondents expressed an interest in participation in an advisory council for the international studies program.

The third step was to identify the interest in an international studies program amongst high school students. An interest survey was conducted with 1,226 ninth graders in the Akron Public Schools. Sixty-five percent of the students who were surveyed indicated an interest in an international studies career program. Specific areas of high interest included international business, accounting, space science, telecommunications, and study of foreign customs, traditions, and values.

The fourth step was for the project staff to collaborate with the teachers in the business department and the social studies department at Central-Hower High School to write the international studies curriculum based on the information that had been collected. The program was designed as a series of classes related to world politics, business, and foreign languages.

The writing team proposed a four-year program, starting with general courses and ending with more specific courses. The program was designed to begin with ninth graders enrolled in a culture survey course that will explore geography, history, government, languages, etc. of various cultures around the world. This course will be followed in tenth grade with a course in which students develop awareness of different careers and various life skills. The two-year International Studies Program will begin in the 11th grade for those students who have completed the previously described courses. Figure 1 illustrates the course sequence.

Figure 1

9th Grade	Global Living and Communication
10th Grade	Employment Awareness with Guidance and Life Skills
11th Grade & 12th Grade	International Studies Program (All students at this level are required to take upper level foreign language classes.)

The International Studies Program has three components: foreign languages, business, and social studies. Each component supports and augments the others. This integrated program has been designed to prepare students to enter fields in which proficiency in a foreign language can enhance career opportunities.

The foreign language component of the International Studies Curriculum was written for students to apply their second language skills to real-life work settings and to expand their vocabulary in new, career-specific areas. They will explore careers in which foreign language skills are beneficial; make cross-cultural

comparisons between American business practices and foreign business practices; and become familiar with international and intercultural programs in their community. Additionally, they will explore exchange programs and travel opportunities in foreign countries.

The business component of the International Studies Curriculum was written for students to learn about international trade and investment in major countries throughout the world. In this section students will explore such concepts as global interdependence, history and growth of international business, trade barriers, international monetary system, and marketing strategies.

The social studies component of the International Studies Curriculum was written for students to study world geography, world history, international political and economic systems, recent global power politics, and current events. In this section students will explore such concepts as the relationship of geography, topography, and climate to the economic development of nations, systems of government, population analysis, international commerce, political philosophy and doctrine, and diplomatic relationships amongst nations.

The final step for this curriculum is its implementation. As of yet it has not been established in any school, however, the directors of the Critical Foreign Languages Program have been talking with principals and teachers about the great potential of this curriculum plan. A number of educators are interested in it, especially as a program that could be realized in a magnet school.

In summary, this paper has described the Critical Foreign Languages Program, an innovative program that has sought to improve and expand the instruction of foreign languages in the northeastern area of Ohio.

APPENDIX A

EXAMPLE OF A SPANISH LESSON FROM THE SUMMER INSTITUTE FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS

Lesson Focus: Applying for a Job

Proficiency Level: Intermediate/Advanced

Language Skills: Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening

Time: 40 minutes

Objectives:
(1) Participants will read examples in Spanish of a resume, a letter for a job application, and a dialogue between an interviewer and an applicant.
(2) Participants will write their own resume in Spanish.
(3) Participants will form pairs and develop an interview in Spanish.

Procedures:
(1) Introduce the new material. Show and discuss examples of a resume in Spanish and a letter of application for a job in Spanish.
(2) Ask participants to answer questions regarding information on the resume. Have participants read and discuss a dialogue of a job interview.
(4) Activity: Have participants form pairs. Participant A will write a resume in Spanish. Participant B will create 5 to 10 questions on a specific job position. Then the participants will role play a job interview in Spanish.
(5) Have participants discuss the experience and how it can be applied to their own teaching situations.

Materials:

Curry, Richard. (1985). Carreras: Negocios. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Company.
Jarvis, Ana. (1988). Spanish for Business and Finance. Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company.
Steel, Barbara. (1973). Business Letter Handbook. New York: Regents Publishing Company, Inc.

Evaluation:
Follow up the lesson the following day with a question-answer session on the basic steps to follow when applying for a job in a Spanish speaking country.

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